

ISSJ 188 – Remembering slavery

Abstracts

Silence and reparations

Jean Michel Deveau

For poorly understood reasons of guilt, the history of the slave trade has long remained hidden. This has led to an ignorance that could prove damaging for today's young people. A shared knowledge of the past is crucial if we are to train young minds to work towards a better, more peaceful world. For several years UNESCO has been working towards this goal through its International Scientific Committee of the Slave Route and network of Associated Schools.

African influence on culture and music in Dubai

Aisha Bilkhair Khalifa

This paper has two major sections. The first section provides historical review, introduces the history of Dubai and describes the power dynamics and social interactions between its tribal population and slaves of African descent. Further this section discusses and analyzes the social and cultural assimilation of African slaves in the host society.

The second section investigates the role music and rituals played in the lives of slaves. It specifically illustrates the merger of African music and lyrics with Gulf poetry to produce the hybrid known as *al-nahmah*, a sea chant. This section reveals how the different African musical genres and rituals functioned to sustain slaves' existence. Finally, this section links spirit possession to slavery as a form of slave resistance and a method to cope with enslavement.

The conclusion includes a discussion of topics addressing the historical links and contemporary connections between Dubai society and the music of African descendants. Despite the prolonged silence around the issue of slavery and its legacy, through music and rituals Gulf African slaves were able to leave an indelible mark that ultimately documents, records and preserves their experience of enslavement

**Trading on a thalassic network:
African migrations across the Indian Ocean**

Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya

African migration eastwards has received far less academic attention than that across the Atlantic. While westwards migration was concentrated over a few centuries, migration across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean has been continuing for over a millennium. Migration eastwards was both free and forced. Nevertheless, slavery and the slave trade were a major force in this phenomenon. Displaced Africans found themselves amongst people who had diverse cultural values and who spoke different languages. Within this context, the ethnicity of the slaves was not important to the slavers. Often slaves were separated from their kith and kin. This situation gave rise to cultural transformations but music and dance are among the striking cultural retentions. Creolization resulted in some instances. While contemporary Afro-Asian communities are marginalized. This paper considers the plight of the descendants of African migrants to the Indian Ocean island of Sri Lanka.

**The Haitian revolution and the struggle against slavery:
Challenges to knowledge, ignorance and silence**

Rex Nettleford

“Coming to terms” with the slave trade and slavery is best done by “engaging” the facts of history through research, analysis and interpretation targeting specific experiences both in the actual administration and operation of the trade and in its consequences in the African diaspora. The article refers specifically to the case of Haiti (Saint Domingue), both to its liberation and to its impact on the rest of the slave-holding world, as well as to what succeeded emancipation and to the aftershocks, leading up to modern times. Despite considerable progress in historical research, it remains for scholars and others to engage the silence, defeat the ignorance and build the knowledge of a still significant dimension and period of modern human history, at least for some millions of souls in the African diaspora.

Slavery and denial

Anthony Holiday

This paper is a conceptual examination of the rational status of instances of denials of the truth about slavery and its place in human history, where such denials are not merely revisionary but include gross elisions or distortions of historical fact. Beginning with a discussion of uses and abuses of the negation sign in formal logic, the investigation moves on to consider “thick” examples of an instance of slavery denial in South Africa and Holocaust denial in the case of David Irving. I conclude that such denials are indeed instances of irrationality, although not of insanity in the contemporary clinical sense of that term and that the appropriate response to them is to exclude the deniers from the community of rational discourse.

**Memory and slavery:
the issues of historiography**

Salah Trabelsi

In all the historical research dedicated to the Arab-Muslim world, the study of slavery remains a little explored subject. Neither the violence of the trade nor the roles assigned to the multiple layers of the servile classes really seem to have stirred the interest of Arab historians. In fact, while the collection of data is aimed at reconstructing an object that happened in the past, the phenomenon proves to be neither truly distant in the past nor truly over, and the distinction between levels of intelligibility of discourse is difficult to grasp because of the contemporary echoes. In addition, the dominant representations form an obstacle to any distancing process propitious to the transformation of the phenomenon into an object of knowledge. The paucity of the sources adds to the ambiguities and inconsistencies. It obscures the prospects for understanding and explaining the forms that slavery has taken throughout history. In general, Arab sources are loath to deal with the dull life of the amorphous and resigned serving masses. However, chroniclers do sometimes direct their attention to the despicable life of the plebeians, especially when it manifests itself dramatically in riots and revolts. It is in this way that the usurped history emerges from oblivion to take on meaning in the collective memory.